



The winner . . . Raddy Antic slams the crucial goal



My ball, says Luton's Brian Stein (left) under pressure from Paul Power

ENTER LIFE-SAVER RADDY

RADDY ANTIC has scored some superb and vital goals in his professional career in Yugoslavia, Spain and England.

But none more vital than the one he poked past keeper Alex Williams five minutes from time at Maine Road, Manchester, on Saturday to keep Luton in the First Division.

Antic was sent on as the Town's trump card in the 65th minute to replace Wayne Turner in midfield.

82/83

Antic strikes with five minutes left

And 20 minutes later, the Yugoslavian international responded brilliantly to the call.

Brian Stein, back in the team after missing half the season with a foot injury, pushed over a cross which Williams could only punch clear. The ball fell to Antic's right foot and that chance was enough to

relegate City after 17 years in the top flight.

Life-saver

So Luton faced a hectic last five minutes when City surged forward desperately in search of the point which would have kept them up. It didn't arrive, and Luton's deliriously happy players raced for the sanctuary of

their dressing room at the end.

This famous victory was nothing more than the Hatters deserved. They patiently attacked City from the start, building slowly and, although they went through a few harrowing moments themselves, it was clear they were the better side on

the day.

It was a cruel climax to the season and those 90 nailbiting minutes, watched by a massive 42,000 crowd, were enough to test the heart beats of manager David Pleat, coach David Coates and physiotherapist John Sheridan on the touch-line.

When Antic's goal arrived, Pleat deserved to lose his control and was unable to prevent himself running on to the pitch to signal the Yugoslav's life-saving effort.

It was never a match for the faint-hearted. The booby prize for the losers put too much at stake for that — and it was inevitable that mistakes would be made by both teams.

But Luton's undisputed talent for putting their game together with thought and calmness was too much for City to cope with and they could have had no cause for complaint if they had finally lost by a bigger margin.

Sensible City fans acknowledged they were the day's losers. The stupid minority couldn't face the fact and left the ground to vent their feelings against society.

In contrast, Luton's reward was for intelligent tactics after the manager refused to panic and send his team out with a policy of all-out attack which could have had disastrous consequences.

Consolidate

Instead of surging forward at every opportunity in continuous charges, Luton were prepared to build slowly and strike when the chance occurred.

It paid dividends, albeit with only one goal, but it was enough to give the Town another stab at making their mark in the First Division when Pleat has the opportunity of consolidating his senior squad.

They displayed a bulldog breed performance

which brought heartbreak for City who, although they made Luton hearts flutter on several occasions, never really had the quality of escaping from trouble.

Without injured David Moss, the Town signalled their intentions after only 13 minutes when Paul Walsh's tantalising ball control gave him a chance. But he shot wide.

Then Stein, anxious to add to the Houdini party, headed just wide from skipper Brian Horton's corner in the 26th minute.

With the benefit of Trevor Aylott's bustle and muscle, Stein and Walsh tormented City's defence several times before the Under 21 international striker walloped another effort just off target.

The back-up was provided by other Luton players and Mal Donaghy gave City another scare when he took advantage of Ricky Hill's pass to almost surprise Williams.

And so it went on. Another Horton corner put City in further trouble when Williams managed to block Walsh's shot with his legs before another effort, this time from Kirk Stephen's, was deflected onto the bar and away to safety by Nicky Reid.

Time was running out for the Hatters who were beginning to realise that the point City already had was enough to send Luton tumbling into the Second Division.

But justice was done when Antic gloriously thumped in the winning lifesaving goal — and the champagne in the dressing room after the match tasted as sweet as it did when Luton won promotion by eight points 12 months ago.

■ Luton's after match celebrations — see centre spread



Up and at 'em . . . Trevor Aylott in high-rise mood

Pictures by TONY WARD

MATCH DETAILS

MANCHESTER CITY: Williams; Ranson, McDonald, Reid, Bond, Caton, Tuert, Reeves, Baker, Hartford, Power. Sub: Kinsey.

LUTON TOWN: Godden; Stephens, Goodyear, Horton, Elliott, Donaghy, Hill, Aylott, Walsh, Turner (Antic), Stein.

REFEREE: A. Challinor (Rotherham). ATTENDANCE: 42,843. GOALS: (Antic 85). BOOKING: Walsh (dissent).